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Excerpts From Speech by CIA Chief to Newspaper Editors

Excerpts from an address by Richard Helms, director of Central Intelligence, before the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington as reported by the New York Times News Service.

..I welcome this opportunity to speak to you today about the place of an intelligence service in a democratic government.

In doing so, I recognize that there is a paradox which I hope can be dispelled:

On the one hand, I can assure you that the quality of foreign intelligence available to the United States Government in 1971 is better than it has ever been before.

On the other hand, at a time when it seems to me to be self-evident that our Government must be kept fully informed on foreign developments, there is a persistent and growing body of criticism which questions the need and the propriety for a democratic society to have a Central Intelligence Agency.

I am referring to the assertions that the Central Intelligence Agency is an "invisible government," a law unto itself, engaged in provocative covert activities repugnant to a democratic society and subject to no controls.

Inherent Feeling

This is an outgrowth, I suppose, of an inherent American distaste for the peacetime gathering of intelligence. Our mission, in the eyes of many thoughtful Americans, may appear to be in conflict with some of the traditions and ideals of our free society.

May I emphasize at this point that the statute [National Security Act of 1947] specifically forbids the Central Intelligence Agency to have any police, subpoena or law-enforcement powers, or any domestic security functions. I can assure you that except for the normal responsibilities for protecting the physical security of our own personnel, our facilities, and our classified information,

we do not have any such powers and functions; we have never sought any; we do not exercise any. In short, we do not target on American citizens.

In matters directly affecting the security of the United States, the President and his National Security Council want what we call "national" intelligence — evaluations which reflect the considered and agreed judgment of all of the intelligence components of the United States Government. The production and dissemination of this national intelligence is the responsibility and the primary function of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Can't Take Sides

We not only have no stake in policy debates, but we cannot and must not take sides. The role of intelligence in policy formulation is limited to providing facts — the agreed facts — and the whole known range of facts — relevant to the problem under consideration. Our role extends to the estimate function — the projection of likely developments from the facts — but not to advocacy.

Ironically, our efforts to obtain foreign intelligence in this country have generated some of the more virulent criticism of the Central Intelligence Agency.

It is a fact that we have, as I said, no domestic security role, but if there is a chance that a private American citizen traveling abroad has acquired foreign information that can be useful to the American policy-maker, we are certainly going to try to interview him.

If there is a competent young graduate student who is interested in working for the United States Government, we may well try to hire him.

The trouble is that to those who insist on seeing us as a pernicious and pervasive secret government, our words "interview" and "hire" translate into suborn, subvert and seduce, or something worse.

No Compulsion

We use no compulsion. If a possible source of information does not want to talk to us, we go away quietly. If some student groups object to our recruiting on campus, we fall back to the nearest Federal office building.

Similarly, we welcome the opportunity to place research contracts with the universities, but again, these are strictly voluntary.

And so I come to the fundamental question of reconciling the security needs of an intelligence service with the basic principles of our democratic society. At the root of the problem is secrecy, because it is axiomatic that an intelligence service — whatever type of government it serves — must wrap itself in as much secrecy as possible in order to operate effectively.

If we disclose how much we know, the opposition is handed on a platter highly damaging indications of how and where we obtained the information, in which way our security is vulnerable, and who may have helped us. He can seal off the breach in his defenses, roll up the agents, and shut off the flow of information.

No Easy Answer

I cannot give you an easy answer to the objections raised by those who consider intelligence work incompatible with democratic principles. The nation must to a degree take it on faith that too are honorable men devoted to the service. I can assure you that we are, but I am precluded from demonstrating it to the public.

I can assure you that what I have asked you to take on faith, the elected officials of the United States Government watch over extensively, intensively and continuously.

Starting with the executive branch, the Central Intelligence Agency operates under the constant supervision and direction of the National Security Council. No significant foreign program of any kind is undertaken without the pri-

or approval of an N.S.C. subcommittee which includes representatives of the President, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense.

In addition, we report periodically and in detail on the whole range of foreign intelligence activities to the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, a group of men who have distinguished themselves in government, industry, education, and the professions.

Our budget is gone over line for line by the Office of Management and Budget and by the appropriate committees of the Congress as well.

These are elements of the Senate and Armed Services Committees in both the Senate and the House which — like the President's Board — are told more about our activities and our operations than is known to most of the personnel in our highly compartmented agency. But how, in the end, we are to be supervised is for Congress itself to decide.

In short, the Central Intelligence Agency is not and cannot be its own master.

Ambiguous Role

The same objectivity which makes us useful to our Government and our country leaves us uncomfortably aware of our ambiguous place in it. We may chafe under the criticism we do not answer, but we understand as well as anyone the difficulties and the contradictions of conducting foreign intelligence operations on behalf of a free society.

We are, after all, a part of this democracy, and we believe in it. We would not want to see our work distort its values and its principles. We propose to adapt intelligence to American society, not vice versa.

We believe, and I say this frankly, that our work is necessary to permit this country to grow on in a free and better and more